

OTTAWA CITIZEN

You don't win a Rudy Award, you 'earn' it: Finishing five of the toughest endurance tests available in a single year is a feat well worth noting.

by : Mark Sutcliffe

It's probably the most glamorous evening of the year in the triathlon community and it takes place on the second floor of a pub in Vanier. It may be the most prestigious honour to which an Ottawa-area triathlete can strive and almost everyone who receives it is dressed in jeans and sneakers.

Last night, for the sixth year in a row, the Rudy Awards were presented to a list of athletes who completed five of the toughest endurance tests available in this area.

It may not be the Oscars, but it's probably harder to get a Rudy Award than an Academy Award. More people had their name engraved on the Stanley Cup this year than received a Rudy.

As someone pointed out last night, you don't win a Rudy Award, you earn it. The award is presented to anyone who completes all of the following five events in one year:

- The Winterlude Triathlon, which combines eight kilometres of speed skating with five kilometres of cross-country skiing and five kilometres of running;
- The Keskinada Loppet, a 50-kilometre ski race;
- The Rideau Lakes Tour, in which you cycle 180 kilometres from Ottawa to Kingston on one day and then cycle right back the next;
- Any official marathon of 42.2 kilometres;
- Any official iron-distance triathlon, which includes 3.8 kilometres of swimming, 180 kilometres of cycling and 42.2 kilometres of running.

The honour is named after Rudy Hollywood, the understated guru of the triathlon community and master of the Trirudy.com website. He completed all five events in 2000 and a group of triathletes, including Rick Hellard, decided there should be an award for "anyone crazy enough to copy him."

"The idea was to encourage some cross-training and give people a little different focus than just completing an Ironman," Hollywood says.

Because the events include skiing and skating, the award is unique to Ottawa, and it recognizes people who are training and competing all year round, but it's about more than merely completing a designated checklist of races.

"The events are nice," Hellard says, "but it's the lifestyle of getting ready for them that the Rudy Award is all about."

A total of 19 local athletes earned a Rudy Award this year.

"I think it's incredible that there are that many people in this city who do all of these events," Hellard says.

"Doing these events is fantastic training for an Ironman," says Chris Macknie, who received a record fifth Rudy Award. "It keeps you busy all year, but for me it's just about going out and having fun with my friends rather than completing all of the events."

"It's an awesome way to get ready for an Ironman," says Sean Obrien, who earned his first Rudy Award when he completed the Philadelphia Marathon last weekend. "If I do another Ironman, I'm doing the Rudy Award again."

Macknie and his partner, Zoe Panchen, not only completed all of the events, they also did a longer version of the Rideau Lakes Tour that was 220 kilometres each way, and they did that the day after cycling 180 kilometres on a training ride in Lake Placid.

So that's 620 kilometres in three days.

"And all of that, except for the last 45 kilometres on Sunday, was in full rain gear," Macknie says.

That's the level of commitment that the Rudy Award inspires and rewards.

An enthusiastic crowd of about 100 people cheered loudly for each recipient last night. The event is also the major annual fundraiser for Trirudy.com, which Hollywood and his wife, Joan, operate as a service to triathletes across the world.

Hollywood himself has received the award four times. He took this year off in part because he was too busy putting a roof on his house, but he says he'll try to do it again next year, when he will be 61. That gives you a bit of an idea about why Hollywood is such an inspiration to the triathlon community.

"I feel quite odd about this," he said yesterday.

"People are actually calling me 'Mr. Hollywood.' Wait a minute, it's just me. I'm from a farm. People are saying, 'You're a real hero.'"

"It's not true; it's just people's imagination."

Judging from the number of athletes crazy enough to copy him, and from the reaction last night, a lot of people would disagree.

2006 RUDY AWARD RECIPIENTS

- Kevin Becker
- Katherine Calder-Becker
- Phil Dass
- Rene Dionne
- Yves Fortin
- Julia Fournier
- Roger Girard
- Doug Liversidge
- Chris Macknie
- Denis Morel
- Sean Obrien
- Zoe Panchen
- James Penman
- Sheri McCready
- Steve McCready
- Glenn Robinson
- Paul Schwartzentuber
- Amy Snowdon
- Brent Vandermeer